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Media Release

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Two RI Nonprofits Innovate in a Tight Economy

April 28, 2010--CranstonArc and Looking Upwards, two private, nonprofit organizations that provide services for people with disabilities, have joined forces to create a parent corporation, The Keystone Group. The formation of The Keystone Group will enable the two organizations to use the collective talents of the combined management teams to navigate the challenges posed by a tight economy and to build strength for the future. This announcement was made at a press conference held at the Rhode Island State House on Tuesday, April 27.

The Keystone Group is the result of the shared vision of Tom Kane, president and CEO of CranstonArc, and Carrie Miranda, the executive director of Looking Upwards. "The creation of The Keystone Group was due to our belief that a paradigm shift was going to occur in our field," said Mr. Kane. "We were convinced that developing a new business model would position us to address these changes and continue to fulfill our missions."

"The parent corporation model securely joins the two organizations yet provides great flexibility and autonomy," said Ms. Miranda. "We chose this model because it gives us the ability to be a single large corporation when negotiating, seeking grants or investing in new enterprises and programs. Yet, it allows us to remain separate and unique agencies that can continue to be responsive to the needs of the communities we serve."

The funding stream that enables organizations to support people with disabilities has been significantly reduced over the past several years. The Keystone Group will help to expand the resources and capabilities of both organizations while providing additional stability. Both organizations dedicate a small percentage of their overall budgets to administration. The initial work of The Keystone Group is to create efficiencies in the administrative functions of the agencies. The group will also actualize savings through joint purchasing, fundraising and developing new social enterprises.

Looking Upwards and Cranston Arc collectively serve more than 1,200 children, adults and families. "We are inspired to build a strong foundation because we know what our work means to so many Rhode Islanders," said executive director of Looking Upwards Ms. Miranda. "Our commitment to our communities is the reason for our continued innovation."

Director of Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals, Craig Stenning, addressed the audience calling the forming of The Keystone Group a step forward. "I want to congratulate Looking Upwards and CranstonArc for their understanding, vision and courage to go forward with this endeavor. I look forward to The Keystone Group being a new leader in our state. The success of this collaboration is that these organizations will continue to provide wellbeing, safety and hope so individuals can live their lives in a way that is fulfilling to them."

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Tom Kane will assume the position of president and CEO of the corporation while maintaining his responsibilities at CranstonArc. Carrie Miranda will serve as the executive vice president as she continues in her position as executive director of Looking Upwards. The Keystone Group will be staffed by the current administrative teams from the two organizations. The Keystone Group's board of directors includes three members of the CranstonArc Board and three members of the Looking Upwards Board. Each individual organization will maintain separate boards that will work in conjunction with the parent.

"This is not a process that happens overnight," said Mr. Kane. "We've been working for the better part of two years to create a structure that will work for us. The leaders of our finance, human resource, development and quality and standards departments spent much of this time building a system that integrates the best practices of our two organizations."

"I am excited about the potential of what we created," said Ms. Miranda. It is clearly what is in the best interest of both businesses. I think there are so many possibilities that we couldn't have achieved on our own."

The founders share a vision that includes asking other organizations to join them. Said Mr. Kane, "We believe in this model and hope others will see the value and join us."

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From Left: Carrie Miranda, executive director of Looking Upwards, Tom Kane, president and CEO of CranstonArc and Craig Stenning, director of Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals, celebrate the launch of The Keystone Group, a parent corporation formed by Looking Upwards and CranstonArc to help both organizations continue to provide quality services to their communities in a tight economy and build for the future.